

VETERANS DAY MESSAGE 2016

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Thank You Mayor Zoldos, and members of the Town Council, for the honor to speak to the town of Lovettsville on this 98'th Veterans Day.

Although it became a legal holiday in 1919, it was the 11'th hour of the 11'th day of the 11'th month in 1918 that the Armistice Treaty was signed, officially ending "the Great War," and what was known as "the War to end all Wars," so I give us credit for Veteran's Day beginning in 1918.

There is always a historian in the crowd, so I gladly offer to debate this with anyone at a local establishment, but I will warn you.... Naval Aviators are thirsty people, and we have lots of friends, so be prepared!

A day like today punctuates the fact that words cannot convey our Veteran pride in serving our country's cause, nor the gratitude we hold in our hearts for those who have gone before us and paved the path of excellence. As the daughter of a WWII Veteran, the sister of four Veterans, the wife of a Veteran, as a CITIZEN and a proud American, I say with confidence that all of us here hold the highest honor for our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines... some of whom have paid the ultimate price.

Those are heavy words: the **ULTIMATE PRICE**. For each of us it may hold a slightly different meaning, but for all of us it conveys a sense of finality; an irrevocable loss.

A father who never holds a newborn baby,

A spouse that never hears "I love you" again,

A friend who never returns to base but shall not be forgotten,

A sibling whose sudden and inexplicable absence creates a vacuum in the hearts of his family... the list can go on.

We all know the gravity of this day – some of us more intimately than we can sometimes bear.

There is a particularly poignant element to paying the **ULTIMATE PRICE**.... and that's paying the price without the benefit of conveying our gratitude and love to those we hold most dear.

So today is for my brothers and sisters in arms who never had this opportunity. I want to convey a clear message to you – the great Americans who mean so much to those of us who wear our Nation’s cloth.

My mission is to have you know that Veterans Day extends *beyond* Veterans and their service. It extends to everyone who *makes* a Veteran. Some of you don’t believe you are included in this day, and you might be thinking, “But I’ve never *served* my country.” I want to give you a new way of thinking. My message is to those of you who help *make* the Veteran.

My message is to the **parents** – whether you’ve served in uniform or not, you instill in your children the sense of honor, courage, and commitment. You remind your children that the world doesn’t owe them something simply because they are here. You teach them that they need to serve something bigger than themselves. You make that first imprint; that indelible mark that begins to form a Veteran. Sometimes, you are the Gold Star Mother or Father, and one could argue that *you* have paid the ULTIMATE PRICE, because you live with the pain of witnessing your miracle leave this earth ahead of you. We salute you and your service today.

My message is to the **teachers** – you take the clay that comes to you from parents who made the first imprint, and you masterfully mold that clay. You give everything of yourself to children who are not even your own. These children are equally able to humiliate or humor you, exhaust or exhilarate you, patronize you or make you proud. No matter what, somehow you are called to pour yourself out for them. Your intrinsic motivation breeds a beautiful follow-on... it breeds a Veteran. We salute you and your service today.

I have a special message to the teachers who master music and art (two subjects I never conquered) – you enhance our American education, and provide that slice of expression that would otherwise go unheard and unseen. You instill and encourage patriotism and pride, you enable a pronunciation of citizenship that some would not have without you. You are the enablers of the expression of honor. We salute you and your service today.

My message is to the **coaches** – you hone our Nation’s children into men and women of integrity by teaching them the value of a Team, and the concept of a “Senior Ranking Officer,” also known as a Coach. You measure an athlete’s skill with his or her sense of daring, and sculpt it by adding discipline and devotion. You are perhaps the first exposure a future Veteran will have to the need to follow orders; to *obey* even in chaos. And oftentimes, you are not paid... so you are the “all volunteer force” that structures our all volunteer force. We salute you and your service today.

My message is to our **clergy**, our men and women of God, our Reverends, Priests, Pastors, and Chaplains – you remind us how much Christ loves us, you guide the sheep to the Good Shepherd, you keep our course steady in the storm, you teach us to let our FAITH replace our FEAR, and you remind us to be humble and kind, to give grace, and to give Thanks to God. We would be lost without you. We salute you and your service today.

My message is to our **Police Force**, our **Firefighters**, our **Emergency Responders** – I will always hold you in such high regard. You are close enough, every day, to touch what you have sworn to protect; or to literally feel the weighted threat of what you must fight. As warfighters, we aim to employ our profession at AWAY games, but every day you face the menace of hostility in your own backyard. I will always feel my contribution is small compared to yours. I remain the President of your Fan Club, and most grateful for what you do. We salute you and your service today.

My message is to the **military spouses** – you have the toughest job. I know because shortly after returning from a combat deployment, launching from and landing on the aircraft carrier day and night, it took less than a week for me to determine that getting shot at was easier than “minding the home front.” The reason is that in combat we have procedures for every dull, dirty, and dangerous thing that we do. But what is the *procedure* for carrying a high risk pregnancy to term while chasing a toddler and your husband is deployed? What is the procedure when there is *too much month left at the end of the money*? What is the procedure when you wake to hear your child gasping for air, and you’re solo-parenting, and there are three other kids to think about before you rush to the hospital? Any military spouse in the crowd has had to invent procedures, and oftentimes it begins with calling another military spouse. You are the backbone of the support network of our force. We salute you and your service today.

My message is to the 99% of this country who express appreciation through song, word, and deed for the 1% of our population who comprise the greatest fighting force on the globe. **Congratulations!** I want you to hear today that you *have* served, and you *do* serve, and I have every faith that you will serve as long as you live and breathe, just as we will. *Your* sacrifice, *your* service... is not only meaningful, but critical to making all of us who and what we are as Veterans. I hope that you feel a reflection of the gratitude that you so lovingly pour upon all of us. Please embrace that feeling; you’ve earned every good thing it yields in your heart and soul. You make your country strong.

I pray for you, and I pray that you sustain the will to continue, because we need you. Veterans don't just *appear*; it takes years to generate a quality product of experience and exposure. Remember that we are a product of *your* selfless contribution. We are the Veterans you *made*.

And so now that I've had the opportunity to share my message with you, no matter what happens, I can never be said to pay the ULTIMATE PRICE. That price does not afford one a podium and a microphone, and an audience of those held most dear. I have had the blessed opportunity to convey my heart and soul to you, and say THANK YOU to you, for making us better citizens, better service members; and for making me a better officer, a better wife, mother and child of God.

Thank You Lovettsville, and God Bless *our* continued service to our country!